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A SERMON ON SOURCE-HUNTING

Some years ago a student in our English Seminary, having occasion to read Robert Greene's *Menaphon*, had her attention caught by the opening lines of one of its lyrics:

When tender ewes brought home with evening sunne
Wend to their foldes,
And to their holdes
The shepherds trudge when light of day is done. . . .

And as she read them the conviction flashed upon her that this was just the beginning of Gray's "Elegy," with its curfew, and its lowing herd winding slowly o'er the lea, and its plowman plodding his weary way homeward, and its ultimate darkness. In the course of her English studies she had heard much of parallels and sources: here finally was one all her own. That celebrated first stanza of Gray must have been inspired by the verses of Greene. It was not without difficulty that her instructor at last brought her to see that the coming home of herds and flocks and tired rustics at evening was a phenomenon of country life which any two or three or a hundred poets would be capable of observing, each for himself, quite independently of the others, and that in any such case of similarity, before one could infer literary indebtedness one must be sure that the likeness did not lie in the mere fact of the two poets having chosen the same subject-matter: there must be special resemblances of imaginative handling or style or actual wording which made any other hypothesis improbable.

Now, just this consideration which the seminary student overlooked is being ignored, right and left, today, not only by the rank and file of zealous source-hunters, whom nobody much heeds, but also by men of real ability, authors of volumes and learned articles, short and long, that are quoted with general and deserved respect. Only too often these men, in their study of "influences," pad their lists of parallel passages and points of resemblance between authors with examples which, on examination, are found to prove nothing at all, except that the authors concerned have happened to find in this or

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that common topic the same obvious facts or details. The phenomenon is sufficiently curious. One can hardly believe that these scholars do not know what they are about; they can surely be no more than heedless; but it is strange that they do not see what harm they thereby work to their own soundest arguments; do not perceive that after a man has rejected nine out of a dozen of their parallels as worthless he is not in a mood to accept the remaining three as conclusive. A few examples will suffice, perhaps, to preach the needed sermon.

As good a one as any may be found in Mr. Sidney Lee's recent volume, *The French Renaissance in England*, in the chapters which he devotes to the Huguenot poet, Du Bartas. Here the one case of specific imitation that he sets forward is the horse in *Venus and Adonis*, which he believes to be modeled in part upon the horse in the *Divine Weeks* subdued by Cain. His evidence is best recorded exactly as he gives it, italics and all.¹

SYLVESTER'S TRANSLATION

With *round*, high, hollow, smooth,
brown, jetty *hoof*,
With *pasterns* short, upright, but yet
in mean;
Dry sinewy shanks; *strong*, fleshless
knees, and *lean*;
With *hartlike* legs, broad breast, and
large behind,
With body large, smooth flanks, and
double chined:
A *crested* neck bowed like a half-bent
bow,
Whereon a long, *thin*, *curled* mane doth
flow;
A *firmful* tail, touching the lowly
ground,
With dock between two fair *fat* *but-*
tocks drowned;
A *pricked* ear, that rests as little space,
As his light foot, a lean, bare bony face,
Thin jowl, and *head but of a middling*
size,

VENUS AND ADONIS

His ears *up-prick'd*; his *braided hang-*
ing mane
Upon his compass'd crest now stands
on end;
His nostrils drink the air, and forth
again,
As from a furnace, vapours doth he
send:
Round hoof'd, *short-jointed*, fetlocks
shag and long,
Broad breast, *full eye*, *small head*, and
nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, *straight* legs and
passing *strong*,
Thin mane, *thick* tail, *broad* buttock,
tender hide;

Sometimes he *scuds* far off

To *bid* the wind a base he now prepares,

¹ P. 337, note. The passage in Du Bartas is in the Fourth Part of the First Day of the Second Week. Since this part of Sylvester's translation was published after the appearance of *Venus and Adonis*, Mr. Lee is careful to remark that "Shakespeare probably consulted the French text."

[SYLVESTER'S TRANSLATION]

Full, lively flaming, quickly rolling
eyes,
 Great foaming mouth, *hot-fuming*
nostril wide,
 Of chestnut hair, his forehead starri-
 fied
 As this light horse *scuds*,
Flying the earth, the flying air he
 catches,
Borne whirlwindlike.

[VENUS AND ADONIS]

And *whē'r he run or fly* they know not
 whether.

This catalogue of italicized points is obviously meant to be, and perhaps is, impressive—though some readers might reflect that a few of the points are not unknown, even today, to men who claim no first-hand acquaintance with either the *Divine Weeks* or *Venus and Adonis*. Furthermore, Mr. Lee seems to be unaware that we have a very similar description of a horse in Pulci's *Morgante Maggiore*, canto xv, stanzas 105-7. Though three proverbially make a crowd, it had better, perhaps, be added to the other two. It will need no italics.

Egli avea tutte le fattezze pronte
 Di buon caval
 Piccola testa, e in bocca molto fesso;
 Un occhio vivo, una rosetta in fronte;
 Larghe le nari; e'l labbro arriccias spesso;
 Corto l'orecchio, e lungo e forte il collo;
 Leggier sì, ch'alla man non dava un crollo.

Ma una cosa nol faceva brutto,
 Ch'egli era largo tre palmi nel petto,
 Corto di schiena, e ben quartato tutto,
 Grosse le gambe, e d'ogni cosa netto,
 Corte le giunte, e'l piè largo, alto, asciutto,
 E molto lieto e grato nell' aspetto;
 Serra la coda, e anitrisce e raspa,
 Sempre le zampe palleggiava e innaspa.¹

It is a pity that Mr. Lee did not know this other description, for he might then have given us a particularly interesting study in the field that he has cultivated with so much profit—that of the intermingling

¹ The preliminary stanza, which I omit, gives only one physical detail: "Tra falago e sdonnino era il mantello."

influences of Italy and France in Elizabethan poetry. Did Du Bartas here imitate Pulci? Was it Pulci or Du Bartas that Shakespeare imitated, or was it both? More probably, however, Mr. Lee would have perceived, what must be clear to one not wholly intent on parallels, that all three descriptions are but poetic records of the various "good points" then recognized by connoisseurs in horse-flesh. These would of course vary, according to locality and time, even as the three descriptions vary, but it would be odd if the ideal English steed of the end of the sixteenth century were another beast than the ideal French steed of the same era, or even than the ideal Italian steed of a hundred years earlier; and that Shakespeare, who knew most of what was practically worth knowing in his day, from the prejudices of the rural gentry to the ways of London inn-keepers, should need a foreign poet to teach him the points of a good horse is surely improbable.

Another student in the same field, Professor A. H. Upham, has endeavored to establish a more important parallel between Du Bartas and Spenser.¹ In the Sixth Day of the First Week, in his account of the creation of Adam, the French poet gives us a kind of inventory-description of the human body, accompanied by a running commentary. The description is in good part figurative, and the main figure consists in likening the body to a castle. The fancy is not worked out in all its parts systematically: it is used at the beginning and returned to casually when this feature or that is adaptable to it. Now, in the *Faery Queen*, in the ninth canto of the second book, Spenser, too, gives a detailed account of the human body, and he, too (though with an allegorical strictness far beyond the aims of Du Bartas), represents it under the guise of a castle, the abode of Lady Alma, the soul. Professor Upham believes that Spenser's allegorical description is imitated from that of Du Bartas.²

Now, Du Bartas, of course, was no more the originator of this similitude than Spenser: it had been used before him in the conclusion of the *Roman de la Rose*. Nor would Spenser need to seek it either there or in the *Divine Weeks*, for it lay ready to his hand in

¹ *French Influence in English Literature from the Accession of Elizabeth to the Restoration*, 168-70, 506-18.

² It may be worth notice that Mr. Sidney Lee apparently accepts this opinion: *vide French Renaissance*, 349.

Piers Plowman,¹ in the episode of the Castle Caro, that belongs to the Lady Anima. This episode, indeed, is worth notice, for although there is no attempt in it to work out the features of the body in terms of architecture, although, in fact, the body is not described in any terms at all (the author being interested exclusively in the soul), still, the mere recollection of this castle of the Lady Anima (there is no such lady in Du Bartas) might easily have been what set Spenser's imagination at work upon the more elaborate castle of the Lady Alma. To prove the influence of Du Bartas, then, one must establish between his account of the body and Spenser's special points of resemblance that cannot be accounted for by the natural demands of the subject. This, it seems to me, Professor Upham, despite his array of parallels, fails rather singularly to do. He calls attention to the teeth. These Du Bartas likens to a mill, set to grind food for the stomach; Spenser to a squad of warders, set to guard the main gate of the castle, the mouth. Wherein the resemblance lies, except that both Du Bartas and Spenser, having to describe the body, think the teeth worth notice, does not easily appear. He calls attention to the eyes, which Du Bartas likens to sentinels and Spenser to beacons. The only resemblance is that in both cases they are set on the top of the central tower—and if a poet is describing the body as a castle, he cannot very well avoid calling the head the central tower that rises above the rest of the building. He calls attention to the fact that Du Bartas calls the stomach *hot* and that Spenser gives two stanzas to the heat of the castle kitchen—ignoring the allied fact that both are but expressing the physiological lore of their day. In brief, Professor Upham has altogether failed to take account of natural processes. Given two poets, educated in the same schools of knowledge, working on the same material subject, and using in good part the same symbolism, what is to be expected but that their output should in many details agree? I do not care to assert that Spenser, when he wrote this canto, did not have Du Bartas in mind at all. My contention is only that Professor Upham has travestied argument by parading a lot of similarities which, far from supporting his theory, serve only to distract and confuse.

It is of course not always easy to distinguish between resemblances

¹ A text, passus x; B text, passus ix; C text, passus xi.

that inhere in the common subject-matter of two poems and resemblances that may really be due to direct imitation. How faint the dividing line may be is well illustrated by another parallel in Professor Upham's book.¹ Among the points of similarity between the *Noah's Flood* of Drayton and various passages in Sylvester's version of the *Divine Weeks* is set down a detail of the panic that seizes the sufferers. According to Sylvester, some flee to the mountains;

Some to a Towr, some to a Cedar-tree,
Whence round about a World of deaths they see:
But wheresoever their pale fears aspire
For hope of safety, th' Ocean surgeth higher;
And still, still mounting as they still do mount,
When they cease mounting, doth them soon surmount.

And according to Drayton

. . . . some clamber up to Towers,
But these and them the deluge soon devours,
Some to the top of Pynes and Cedars get,
Thinking themselves they safely there should set:
But the rude Flood that over all doth sway,
Quickly comes up and carrieth them away.

Now there can be little doubt that Drayton's poem was mainly inspired by the *Divine Weeks*; or at least that without the precedent of the *Divine Weeks* it would not have been written; and in this particular passage it may well be that Drayton had his predecessor distinctly in mind. Yet, on the other hand, is not the detail one of those which any poet who undertook to describe the Deluge would inevitably find in his path? The waters are rising: what will men do? Why, clamber up to high places—mountains, towers, lofty trees. And since the scene is biblical, what lofty trees will they find? Manifestly, cedars. And of course the waters will overtake them. When Michael Angelo came to depict the Deluge in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he set forth just this same frenzy of impossible escape, and little more. He had no room in his panel for towers, and his one dead tree with the man climbing it could not be much loftier than a high shrub, but the scene is virtually the same. One does not imagine that Du Bartas took his hint from Michael

¹ P. 522.

Angelo; nor do the details of execution make quite certain that Drayton took his from Du Bartas.

For one doubtful parallel like this, however, dozens may be found in the learned periodicals of the day concerning which there can unfortunately be no doubt at all. Recently,¹ Dean T. W. Nadal has argued that when Spenser wrote his mock-heroic poem *Muiopotmos* he had in mind Chaucer's mock-heroic tale of *Sir Thopas*, and among the points of resemblance between the two works he sets down the arming of the heroes. It may be well to quote the passages.²

SIR THOPAS, ll. 146 ff.

He dide next his whyte lere
Of clooth of lake fyn and clere
A breech and eek a sherte;
And next his sherte an aketoun,
And over that an habergeoun
For percing of his herte;

And over that a fyn hauberk,
Was al y-wroght of Jewes werk,
Ful strong it was of plate;
And over that his cote-armour
As whyt as is a lily-flour,
In which he wol debate.

His sheeld was al of gold so reed,
And ther-in was a bores heed,
A charbocle bisyde. . . .

His jambeux were of quirboilly,
His swerdes shethe of ivory,
His helm of laton bright;
His sadel was of rewel-boon,
His brydel as the sonne shoon,
Or as the mone light.

MUIOPOTMOS, ll. 57 ff.

His breastplate first, that was of substance pure,
Before his noble heart he firmly bound,
That mought his life from yron death assure,
And ward his gentle corpes from cruell wound:
For it by arte was framed to endure
The bit of balefull steele and bitter stownd,
No lesse than that which Vulcane made to sheild
Achilles life from fate of Troyan field.

And then about his shoulders broad he threw
An hairie hide of some wilde beast, whom hee
In salvage forrest by adventure slew,
And reft the spoyle his ornament to bee:
Which, spredding all his backe with dreadfull vew,
Made all that him so horrible did see
Thinke him Alcides with the lyons skin,
When the Næmean conquest he did win.

Upon his head his glistering burganet,
The which was wrought by wonderous device,
And curiously engraven, he did set:
The mettall was of rare and passing price;

¹ *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, XXV (December, 1910), 640-56.

² The reader may be reminded that Spenser's hero, Clarion, is a butterfly.

[SIR THOPAS]

His spere was of fyn ciprees,
 That bodeth werre, and no-thing pees,
 The heed ful sharpe y-grounde;
 His stede was al dappel-gray,
 It gooth an ambel in the way
 Ful softly and rounde
 In londe.

[ΜΥΙΟΡΟΤΜΟΣ]

Not Bilbo steele, nor brasse from
 Corinth fet,
 Nor costly oricalche from strange
 Phœnice;
 But such as could both Phœbus
 arrowes ward,
 And th' hayling darts of heaven beat-
 ing hard.

Therein two deadly weapons fixt he
 bore,
 Strongly outlaunched towards either
 side,
 Like two sharpe speares, his enemies to
 gore.

 Lastly his shinie wings, as silver bright,
 Painted with thousand colours, passing
 farre
 All painters skill, he did about him
 dight.

Had Dean Nadal contented himself, in this case, with noting the similarity of incident, the fact that both heroes, about to set forth on adventure, arm themselves piece by piece in the manner approved by epic and romance poets as far back as Homer,¹ his point, though it might not carry much conviction of Spenser's indebtedness, would be unassailable. But he is not content with so little; he must find resemblances of detail, which may be marked in italics. Sir Thopas has a "whyte lere"; Clarion a "gentle corpes." Sir Thopas puts on "an habergeoun, for percing of his herte"; Clarion binds "his breast-plate . . . before his noble heart." Sir Thopas' "fyn hauberk was al y-wroght of Jewes werk," and on his shield was "a bores heed, a charbocke bisyde"; Clarion's "burganet . . . was wrought by wonderous device, and curiously engraven." In fact, says Dean Nadal, "there is an interesting resemblance between the armors of the two knights." He does not note that the resemblance, such as it is, could hardly have been avoided, but proceeds at once to conclude that "Spenser had in mind either Chaucer's description or else a similar description which Chaucer himself was parodying." If such

¹ The arming of Clarion might be compared with the arming of Agamemnon at the outset of *Iliad* xi.

comparisons are to hold, then surely Pope's account of the toilet of Belinda, from the moment when

*robed in white*¹ the nymph intent adores,
With head uncover'd, the cosmetic powers,

to that when

awful Beauty *puts on all its arms*,

must be another of the possible reminiscences of *Sir Thopas*.

Hunting after parallels has nowhere been pushed more vigorously than in the field of the Petrarchistic love-sonnet. Here it has proceeded, of late years, mainly under the stimulus of Mr. Sidney Lee, whose primary interest in the work has been, on the whole, less that of a student of letters than that of a biographer. It was his concern with the biographical problem of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, that is, which first led him to investigate the sonnet literature of the age, and this biographical preoccupation has more or less dominated his judgment ever since. He seems to be never quite so well satisfied as when he has apparently demonstrated that such and such an Elizabethan sonnet cannot possibly be the record of personal experience, because it is all imitation. How far he is willing to carry his skepticism may be illustrated by his treatment of the 68th sonnet of Spenser's *Amoretti*. This, it will be remembered, comes shortly after the poet's acceptance by the lady whom he has been wooing for over a year. The time is Easter Day.

Most glorious Lord of lyfe, that on this day
Didst make thy triumph over death and sin,
And having harrowd hell, didst bring away
Captivity thence captive, us to win:
This joyous day, deare Lord, with joy begin,
And grant that we, for whom thou diddest dye,
Being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin,
May live for ever in felicity:
And that thy love we weighing worthily,
May likewise love thee for the same againe;
And for thy sake, that all lyke deare didst buy,
With love may one another entertayne.
So let us love, deare love, lyke as we ought:
Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.

¹ Cf. "whyte lere"—transferred epithet?

This sonnet, says Mr. Lee,¹ "was clearly suggested by Desportes' ejaculation at the same season [i.e., Eastertide] which unexpectedly fills a niche in the poet's *Amours de Diane*."

Here is the ejaculation of Desportes (Bk. II, sonnet 46):

Je m'estoy dans le temple un dimanche rendu,
Que de la mort du Christ on faisoit souvenance,
Et, touché jusqu' au cœur de vive repentance,
Je soupiroy le tans que j'ai mal despendu.
"O Seigneur! qui des cieux en terre es descendu,
Pour guarir les pecheurs et laver leur offance,
Que ton sang, ruisselant en si grande abondance,
N'ait point esté pour moi vainement respandu!
Seul Sauveur des humains, sauve ta creature!"
J'achevoy de prier, quand je vey d'avanture
Celle dont les beaux yeux sans pitié m'ont deffait.
"Ah! Dieu!" ce dy-je alors, la voyant en priere,
Triste et l'œil abaissé, "ceste belle meurtriere
Se repent-elle point du mal qu'elle m'a fait?"

What have these two sonnets in common? Nothing whatever, except that both have to do with Easter; in thought, temper, and all that constitutes style they are radically different. What then is Mr. Lee's theory of the relation between the two? Apparently this, that Spenser, as a poet of the Petrarchistic school, could not have written this sonnet on Easter Day without the inspiration of Desportes; or, to speak more accurately, that since Desportes wrote a sonnet on a reminiscence of Easter Day, Spenser's sonnet composed on that day and inspired by thoughts of the season must be an imitation of it, or must have been suggested by it. The vista which this theory opens is fairly appalling. To know that these Petrarchists borrowed ideas, images, sentiments, tricks of style from each other, imitated or translated whole sonnets when they felt inclined, is one thing; but to think that even the best of them, men of original power in other fields of poetry, when for instance they seemed to fall sick, like other men, and wrote a sonnet or two during what appeared to be convalescence, were presumably borrowing both sickness and sonnets, if not convalescence, from some earlier poet—to think that is to have

¹ Introduction to *Elizabethan Sonnets* (Constable, 1904), xcix. Mr. Lee does not there indicate which sonnet of Desportes he means, though a reader might guess. In his recent *French Renaissance*, 263, note, he supplies the number.

one's faith in poor human nature (and in the plain probabilities of human conduct) sorely shaken. Mr. Lee, however, seems to have overlooked one main trait of Petrarch's influence. The melancholy Tuscan not only founded a style of love-poetry and established a code of situations, moods, ideas, and images for subsequent poets, but he taught lovers how to use the trivial daily incidents of life as matter for sonnets. To send a present of small game to a friend, to take a walk in the country and fall into a brook, to see your mistress coming from a visit to a sick relative, to find, one day, that she has been requested by her family to stay at home, somewhat against her will¹—experiences like these, he taught, were matter out of which excellent sonnets might be built. His followers, especially in France and England, learned this lesson and put it in practice. That two of them happen to write of similar experiences surely does not prove that one necessarily took his cue from the other.

This point may further be exemplified from the work of Professor L. E. Kastner. As all students of the subject know, he has, like Mr. Lee, made most valuable contributions to our knowledge of Petrarchism in Great Britain, but none the less, apparently under the influence of Mr. Lee's theory, he has sometimes darkened counsel. For example, in No. 48 of the *Amoretti*, Spenser apostrophizes a certain copy of verses which he has sent to his mistress and which she has burned unread. This sonnet, Professor Kastner thinks,² was "certainly suggested by" one of Desportes (*Diane*, II, 75) in which the poet, addressing his verses, tells them to beware when they come into his mistress' hands, lest the flame of her eyes consume them. It may be well to print the two side by side.

Innocent paper, whom too cruell hand
Did make the matter to avenge her
 yre,
And ere she could thy cause wel under-
stand,
Did sacrifice unto the greedy fyre:
Well worthy thou to have found better
 hyre

O vers que j'ai chantez en l'ardeur qui
 m'enflame,
Je deviens à bon droit de vostre aise
 envieux!
Vous viendrez en la main et retiendrez
 les yeux
Qui retiennent ma vie en l'amoureuse
 flame.

¹ In the Leopardi edition, which has at least this merit for reference-use that it is the one most commonly met with in small public and private libraries, these sonnets are Nos. 7, 43, 28, 167 of the first part, *In Vita di Madonna Laura*.

² "Spenser's 'Amoretti' and Desportes," *Modern Language Review*, IV (1908), 65 ff.

Then so bad end, for hereticks or-
dayned:

Yet heresy nor treason didst conspire,
But plead thy maisters cause unjustly
payned:

Whom she, all carelesse of his griefe,
constrayned

To utter forth the anguish of his hart:
And would not heare, when he to her
complayned

The piteous passion of his dying smart.
Yet live for ever, though against her
will,

And speake her good, though she
requite it ill.

Gardez-vous seulement des regards de
ma dame,

Ardans flambeaux d'amour, benins et
gracieux,

Car s'elle peut brûler les mortels et les
dieux,

Elle vous brûlera comme elle a fait mon
ame.

Je sçay qu'il eust fallu, pour monstrier
son pouvoir,

Un esprit plus divin, plus d'art, plus de
sçavoir;

Mais, estant plein d'amour, je fuy tout
artifice.

J'écry ce que je sens, mon mal me fait
chanter,

Et le plus beau laurier que j'en veux
meriter,

C'est d'allegier ma peine et la rendre
propice.

Just what does Professor Kastner wish us to infer in this case? Apparently, that Spenser invented the whole story, that the verses he apostrophizes, if they ever existed, were not really burned, but that, having read the sonnet of Desportes, he was inspired to pretend that they had been. But how, then, came the sonnet of Desportes to inspire that particular fiction? It speaks of no real burning, already accomplished; it only pays a kind of prophetic compliment to the fire of his lady's eyes, a compliment which, if Spenser did actually try to imitate it, he spoiled, for the fire that is represented as consuming his verses is just plain matter-of-fact household fire. Perhaps Professor Kastner has in mind that both poets apostrophize their verses; but surely, a convention so immemorial as that cannot be stretched to imply imitation. One is left to wonder what Professor Kastner really does mean.

How far afield this eagerness of source-hunting may lead a man is best shown, perhaps, in one final example, from *The French Renaissance in England*.¹ There, in the section devoted to Rabelais, Mr. Lee brings up the speech of Sir Andrew to the Clown, in *Twelfth Night* (II, iii, 22 ff.): "In sooth, thou wast in very gracious fooling last night, when thou spok'st of Pigrogromitus, of the Vapians pass-

¹ P. 162.

ing the equinoctial of Queubus. 'Twas very good, i' faith." The words attributed by Sir Andrew to the Clown he thus comments on: "This is the mystifying kind of jargon which Rabelais loved. The words are not to be found in Rabelais's text, but poor rabbit-witted Sir Andrew is hardly likely to report correctly in the morning a difficult verbal quip which he had heard at a convivial debauch at a late hour the night before." In short, Mr. Lee is not content with the common opinion that in the Clown's jargon Shakespeare is imitating the humorous jargon of Rabelais. No, there must be a more definite source, some special phrase of Rabelais that has got itself transmogrified. And how has it got itself transmogrified? Ah! therein we have an example of Shakespeare's subtle sense of character. What the Clown really uttered was true Rabelais, but Sir Andrew could not of course be expected to remember in the morning what he had heard, when drunk, the night before. To have preserved the true Rabelais, for the delectation of future source-hunters, would have been to falsify Nature.

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